

Jane ordered the train to stop when it reached the point that the ambush had occurred. The conductor pointed out where it had happened, having received the coordinates from the railroad office. Jane inspected the ground as the conductor nervously glanced at his watch. She stood and looked over at Brenner.

“Get the horses. We ride from here, following those tracks.” She barked.

Brenner nodded and with the other agents began to get the horses off the livestock car.

The Conductor wiped his brow with a red handkerchief. “Be careful around here. One of the bandits got bit really bad by a snake during the battle.”

Jane looked at him suspiciously. “A snake? In the middle of the night? Hardly believable.”

“That’s what the train company wired back. Said that during the fracas, one of the bandits got bit pretty bad by a snake. Paralyzed him pretty good for about an hour.”

Jane raised an eyebrow at the conductor’s cluelessness, “Paralyzed? For an hour? What kind of snake just paralyzes you for an hour? A rattler’s poison will kill you.”

The conductor thought for a moment. “Come to think of it, the railroad company said it was a snake, but the bandit who’d been bit kept saying it weren’t a snake. He was swearing up and down it was something else. Some kind of creature he’d never seen before.”

Jane smiled and whispered. “A prairie fire.”

“What’s that?” The conductor asked.

Jane ignored his question and looked over her shoulder at Brenner. “Brenner, let’s go. We can’t waste any more time.” She turned back to the conductor. She took another 100 dollar bank note from a pocket. “You’ve been most helpful. We’ll be getting off here. You may proceed to Yankton.”

She handed the note to the conductor and turned to speed up the unloading of the horses.

Meanwhile, in the valley about 10 miles away from where Jane was, Grison,

Charlie and Doris had taken a good twenty minutes to hike around the side of the valley and come up to the edge. Below them in a heavily wooded patch of forest they could see black smoke rising from the chimney of a small, log cabin.

“Damn.” Grisom said, spitting out a wad of chew. “This is the absolute worst scenario. They have cover from all sides. They could have lookouts spread out anywhere.”

“How are we going to get down there without them seeing us?” Charlie asked.

“There ain’t no way. So we’re gonna have to let them see us.”

“What?” Charlie questioned.

“Come on, we gotta go back to the horses.” Grisom was up and walking back down the hill. “We’re going to get ourselves captured.”

Charlie scrambled to go after him.

Down at the cabin, Leland sat amongst a stack of gold bars. He smiled as he spooned a piece of salt pork into his mouth and chewed noisily. “This here is our retirement boys. Look at all that gold. Tomorrow we ride south to Mexico and then it’s just the highlife for the rest of our lives.”

The two men gathered in the cabin with Leland cheered and raised a cup each up in salute. After a beat, one of the men raised a question, “What about Jimmy?”

Leland’s face turned dour. He nodded and scratched his chin. “Well, Jimmy is a real sad case I reckon. No doubt he was caught and is probably near close to being put in a Yankton cell right about now.”

The men nodded silently.

Then Leland continued, “However, Jimmy knew the risks of the job then he took it. In honor of Jimmy, we shall spend his share of the gold wisely in Mexico!”

The men cheered loudly and again raised their cups again.

Their reverie was suddenly interrupted by a loud pounding on the door. The three men jumped and instinctively reached for their guns.

A voice boomed from outside, “Leland! Leland get out here.”

Leland stood from his chair, hand on hip, “Iron Dog? What are you doing back

here. You're supposed to be on lookout."

"I was on lookout. Caught two men trying to sneak into camp."

The three men in the cabin rushed to the door. Leland threw it open and the three squinted in the sunlight as their eyes adjusted the sight that lie before them. Iron Dog stood at the door with his rifle aimed at a spot about fifteen feet in front of the cabin. There were Grisom and Charlie hands raised, in placid complacency.

Leland smirked and stepped out of the cabin. "What do we have here? Where do you think you were going?"

"We were going to see you." Grisom replied.

Leland was quiet for a second. Then he smiled. "You," he said pointing to Grisom. "You're the fella from the train."

Grisom nodded. "That I am. Name's Grisom and I've come for my trunk."

Leland let out a loud laugh. "Ha! You've come for your trunk have you." He looked in Charlie's direction. "This here your back up?"

Grisom didn't say a word. Charlie was sweating profusely.

Leland looked to the indian covering the two men. "Iron Dog, you take their guns off of them?"

Iron Dog shook his head. "No. No guns. They came unarmed."

Leland looked back at Grisom. "You walked into my camp, unarmed, with the goal of getting you trunk back."

"That's right. And that's what I aim to do."

Leland let out another loud laugh, "Ha! Well, you are either the bravest man who ever set foot in these parts or the dumbest fool that ever lived." He was quiet for a second then turned to the two men in the cabin's doorway. "Truett, Buck, go get that trunk and drag it out here."

The two men looked at each other quizzically. Leland looked back at them, "Now!" The men fell over each other scrambling back into the cabin. Leland looked back at Grisom, "We're going to see what's so important about this trunk of yours."

A beat later the two men came shuffling out of the cabin, carrying the trunk in between them. They strained under the weight of it and slowly maneuvered it to over in front of where Leland stood and set it down. Once it was down they backed off. All eyes were on the trunk.

Slowly Leland walked around the trunk, examining it as he did. It was clear from the wear on the trunk it had seen a lot of use. The hardware was tarnished to the point that it was difficult to make out what type of metal was used in construction. There were all manner of stains and dents covering the wood on all sides. Peppered on all sides of the trunk were strange symbols. Leland, at first, took them to be letters, but upon closer examination they were odd symbols of objects he just couldn't discern. Not the type of writing that Indians usually used, but something else. He got to the front and noticed the big heavy padlock on the front. Standard issue, like most found on lock boxes from the bank, but this one was different in that it had no key hole.

"Truett, bring me the crowbar." Leland said softly, looking at Grisom and holding out a hand.

Truett ducked into the cabin and returned seconds later with the crowbar, handing it to Leland.

Grisom cleared his throat. "Leland. Mind if I call you Leland?"

Leland glared at Grisom. He did not reply.

"Leland, what's inside that box is very old. Very, very old. It has no significant value to anyone other than sentimental. Charlie and I were just bringing it to Yankton where it'll be stored away and forgotten about. The contents of the trunk include several bound books, some papers and a wooden lap desk. There's nothing else."

Leland smirked, "If that's all that's in there, then you won't mind me taking a look see."

"Well, I wouldn't except the trunk has certain...protections."

Leland pointed with the crowbar. "Like this lock without a key hole? The wood along the sides of this trunk look older than dirt. Why I think that this crowbar will be able to wrench that lock off there in no time flat."

“Well, you would think that but appearances can be deceiving.” Grisom replied.

“We shall see.” Leland said as he positioned the crowbar in the lock where the top of the bolt rested.

Grisom whispered to Charlie, “Close your eyes. Then when it happens, we carry out the plan.” Charlie nodded and closed his eyes tight..

“Hush.” Iron Dog barked, not able to hear what they had said, but he raised his rifle towards them.

Leland gave a glance back at Grisom and then with all his might he wrenched down on the crowbar.

Three things happened all at once. The big thing was that there was sudden flash of bright blue light. Even in the direct sunlight of the morning it caused everyone to cover their eyes. The second thing was that as the flash engulfed them all, Leland was blown back from the trunk about 10 feet by some unseen force. He landed hard on his back and the force at which he'd been thrown knocked the wind out of him. The third thing was that this bright blue flash and the force that knocked Leland back didn't create an ounce of noise. In fact, the birds in the surrounding trees continued to sing as they had been seconds before. This lack of noise was a good thing as at that moment, Charlie had let out a high whistle and from the tree near where they stood, Doris dropped to the ground with the saddlebag around her neck. She dropped it between Charlie and Grisom and they reached into the bag and grabbed their revolvers.

Before the bandits could focus their eyes again, Charlie and Grisom started firing. Charlie took out Iron Dog first and then turned and shot at Truett. Grisom had dropped Buck who had started to get up, the shot knocked him back to the ground. Grisom ran to where Leland lie on the ground gasping for air. Grisom watched as Leland's focus came back to him. His eyes looked up into Grisom's. He tried to form a sentence but nothing came out.

Grisom crouched next to his head, “I do believe I warned you not to try and open that trunk.”

Leland gasped loudly for air, “What....what...what...?”

“None of your business.” Grisom replied and hit Leland on the head with the butt of his gun, knocking him out. Grisom stood and looked over at Charlie who

was just coming out of the cabin having made sure there was no one else inside.

“Clear.” Charlie nodded. “You think there’s other members of the gang around?”

“Possibly,” Grisom nodded. He scanned the ring of trees that surrounded the cabin. “Let’s get the trunk into the wagon and get out of here. Even if there ain’t more members of the gang, the shots’ll probably bring someone nosing around.”

Charlie looked back into the cabin, “What about the gold?”

“I reckon we should take it with us. We’ll take that and this one here with us,” Grisom replied, indicating Leland, “and we’ll bring them both to Yankton.”

For the next few minutes Doris scurried around the cabin getting into the food and knocking things over, while Grisom and Charlie loaded the trunk, the gold and the bound Leland onto the back of the bandit’s wagon. They also pillaged some water and a little food for the journey to Yankton that Grisom figured would take them three days to make. About twenty minutes after the ruckus had begun, they were on the wagon on their way to Yanktown.